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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

INFORMATION REPORT

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SUBJECT	Port of Mezen	DATE DISTR.	15 April 1954
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2. On 17 July 1953, a group of Soviet naval vessels on a westerly course came from Cape Kanin and headed for the Kola Peninsula. The group consisted of seven identical vessels which proceeded at 11 knots in line formation. They were about one-and-one-half miles from informant's ship. They were about 60 meters long with clipper bows. Each ship had one gun on the foredeck, low bridge superstructures with a small squat stack which projected slightly aft, and a raked mast on the bridge. Another squat stack was located amidships, aft of a light gun which was mounted on a short superstructure. A second similar gun behind a protective shield was on the fantail.
3. Two other warships, a gunboat and a destroyer, were sighted off Kola Peninsula. They proceeded at slow speed on an easterly course in the direction of Cape Kanin. the gunboat was an obsolete type as it had a plumb bow, a rounded stern, a tall stack, and high bridge superstructures. A canvas-covered gun on the foredeck was the only piece of armament distinguishable. The ship was about 40 meters long. It was followed by the destroyer, which was between 100 and 120 meters long. The destroyer had a slanting stack, two masts, a gun turret on the foredeck, another gun behind a protective shield just forward of the bridge, and two torpedo mounts amidships.

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4. [redacted] ship anchored near Nyerninskiy Point (N 66-14, E 43-40), with Nyerninskiy Point bearing 278° true and Maslyany Head (N 66-10, E 43-40) bearing 207° true. The water was five fathoms, forward and aft, at low ebb tide. Navigation farther upstream was possible only with the aid of a pilot during the two hours before and after high tide. The tidal stream had a velocity of between six and seven knots, in as well as out, and it turned rather quickly at low or high tide. The mean maximum depth two hours before and after high tide was 14 feet. [redacted] 25X1

[redacted] there were many more buoys, beacons, and other navigational markers than appeared on the charts. The characteristics of the coastal lights, which had been located by compass bearings taken while under way, also differed from those indicated in the international light list. The soundings indicated in the British charts were inaccurate, and those in the prescribed swept channels were deeper than those indicated on the charts.

5. [redacted] ship weighed anchor and continued its trip after taking on the Soviet pilot, who had been carried aboard by a launch off Nyerninskiy Point. [redacted] the ship dropped anchor in the Mezen River in front of the loading pontoon at the lumber yard. There were about 10 small merchant ships and motor vessels at anchor in the area. [redacted] ship was searched for three and one-half hours by an examination party of two officers and three men. While at anchor, [redacted] the ship was strictly forbidden to put out any scaffolds or ladders or to lower any boats. All merchant ships were moored in mid-stream, one behind the other. They were guarded by a navy-manned Soviet fishing cutter, which was moored about 200 meters from the ship which lay farthest downstream. No Soviet sentries remained aboard the merchant ships. 25X1 25X1

6. Provisions were difficult to obtain, as food had to be ordered by signal two days in advance. As this was unknown to the master of informant's ship, it did not receive any provisions. Drinking water, which also had to be asked for by signal, was delivered 36 hours after the signal and was carried alongside by a tugboat. Informant believed that the water was filtered from the river, as it tasted stuffy and warm. The temperature of the air varied between plus 10° and plus 25° C. There were enormous numbers of mosquitoes.

7. Mezen had no harbor installations. When a ship's turn had come for loading operations, it was towed alongside one of the loading pontoons by one of the two tugboats, which also served as water carriers. Two ships were simultaneously alongside one of the two piers, which consisted of two steel pontoons. The pontoons were connected by iron girders and served as berths for the two tugboats. The loading pontoons were linked with the shore by two smaller pontoons on which a plank floor was laid. While the right-hand bank of the river consisted of sand banks which gradually sloped to the river, the left-hand bank was steep and about 30 meters high. A plank-floored roadway was dug into the steep bank on each side of the two pontoons. Cargo for the ships was taken from lumber piled up on the steep bank. Informant estimated that the piles of lumber extended as far as 2,000 meters. The lumber was carried to the pontoons by American-type bulldozers and was taken aboard with the ship's gear. Two bulldozers serviced each pontoon. A large sawmill was located downstream from the lumber. Work at the lumber piles and on the loading pontoons was done in day and night shifts of twelve hours each. [redacted] ship took on 363 standards of lumber. 25X1 25X1

Twelve Soviet workers, including four women, performed the loading operations; six of them worked ashore and the other six on the ship. They looked tidy, but they were uncommunicative and did not accept any cigarettes offered. They seemed satisfied, worked quickly and expertly; they were between 25 and 35 year old.

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8. The ship's crew was not given shore leave until the ship had moored at the pontoon. [REDACTED]

25X1 [REDACTED] the crew members were carried to Mezen in groups of seven
25X1 on trucks with bus-type armchairs. They were unguarded as they drove to
25X1 Mezen through a wooden triumphal arch, at which an armed civilian checked the
truck driver. All buildings in Mezen were built of wood, and the streets
had plank covering. The population looked clean. There were no persons in
rags. No motor vehicles were in the streets, nor were any soldiers observed
in Mezen or on the way to this village. The crew members were entertained by
25X1 seven to ten nice-looking and well-dressed girls at the seaman's club in Mezen.
Tea and pastry, dancing parties, motion picture performances, and writing
paper and postage stamps were offered free of charge. No money was changed.
All crews had to be back aboard ship not later than midnight and were returned by
truck. They were not checked as they left their ships or returned.

[REDACTED]

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